

May 11, 2008  
Tuscaloosa News

## Road would be dream come true

Alabama has long needed a north-south corridor on its western side so Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom's revival of the plan last week came as a pleasant surprise.

We wish there was something more substantial to be said for the project. However, a half-century of discussions have led to virtually nothing. It's still difficult and dangerous to drive from Florence to Mobile without making a substantial detour to Interstate 65.

Supporters envision a four-lane road running some 300 miles, parallel to the Mississippi border.

The dream thoroughfare would offer an unprecedented degree of safety for motorists who make long trips through western Alabama on two-lane blacktops, some of them heavily traveled by logging companies and mobile home producers.

The new corridor also would open up the poverty-stricken Black Belt counties in West Alabama for growth and development. "If we build the road, economic development will come," promised state Sen. Hank Sanders, D-Selma.

The problem, as always, is money. The state's best estimate of the cost of the new road is \$5 billion. The federal government could provide much of the funding in the next highway bill to be considered by the Congress. But the state's share may be harder to generate.

Some supporters think residents may support a bond issue for the project. Gov. Bob Riley says Folsom needs to get the Senate to pass a toll-road bill that already has cleared the House. It would allow the state's toll road authority to enter into private-public financing agreements.

Alabama has no history of toll roads. Would travelers accept one to accommodate a major north-south highway in western Alabama?

Folsom is forming a joint legislative commission to study that question and others. We applaud the initiative and hope that it, unlike others in the past, actually goes somewhere.